

LIVING ISLAM

Spirituality, or rabbaniyat is the elevation of man to a plane where the mind is focused on the higher, non-material realities of a godly existence.

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Spirituality, or rabbaniyat is the elevation of man to a plane where the mind is focused on the higher, non-material realities of a godly existence. Its opposite is materialism, a course followed all too often in this world.

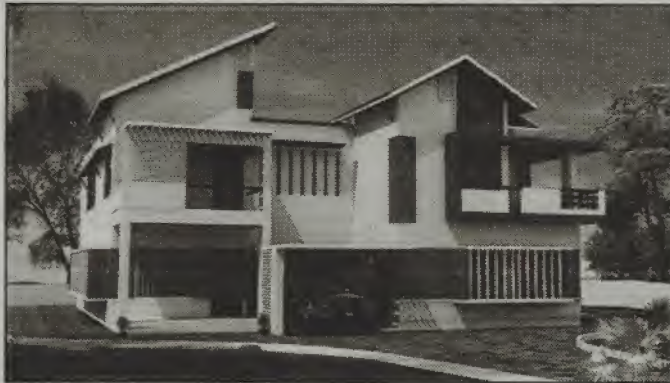
To put it another way, he who focuses on mere appearances is material-minded. And the one who rises above it is spiritual. He obeys the injunction of the Quran: Be devoted servants of God. (Quran: 3: 79).

To understand what constitutes materialism, imagine yourself looking at a palatial house or an attractive car and being overcome by the desire to possess it. A person who is unmoved by these objects and the notions of luxury

they convey, lives in a more rarefied sphere. For him there is little attraction in the world of superficiality, being engrossed as he is in the higher realities of a supremely spiritual life. A truly non-material person's soul exists at a profound level of spirituality. This is the unadulterated truth. Those who live for worldly pleasures believe that gratification cannot be had except through the enjoyment of material goods. But this kind of thinking is the result of sheer ignorance. Having only experienced worldly pleasures, these people come to believe that every kind of enjoyment depends on it alone. If they were to experience spiritual pleasure

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they would quickly forget about material pleasures which are transient, whereas the spiritual kind may be savoured eternally. The taste of good food is enjoyable, but it is only when the experience of eating results in an outpouring of thanksgiving to God that we



attain complete pleasure. A car ride can be exhilarating, but the pleasure that comes from a deep perception of reality—on sensing the indescribably unique power of God as manifested in cars, aero planes and all the other modern amenities created for man's comfort—is far superior

to that which one experiences while travelling in a luxurious automobile. A materially-minded person finds pleasure only in something which he or she actually experiences. The spiritual person will thank God even at the sight of another person's

object. Rather, he transforms his friend's material pleasure into spiritual pleasure for himself. A materially-minded person only sees the creation, while a spiritually-inclined person sees the splendor of the Creator through the creation. It is obvious

that the spiritual riches accruing from the discovery of the Creator cannot be gained through objects he created.

Furthermore, in the spiritual world, there is no great difference between comfort and deprivation. What one gains from material experiences is of lesser value than

what one learns from deprivation. Tears of pain hold greater lessons than laughter.

The greatest source of pleasure is in the remembrance of God. It is this reality which finds expression in the following verse of the Quran:

Only in the remembrance of God are hearts comforted. (Quran: 13: 28)

Comfort here implies peace of mind that stems only from God, and not merely temporary solace. Man is an idealist by nature. Anything short of ideals only attracts fitful attention. Existing only at the materialistic level is like descending into animalism. Materialism is, in other words, a form of shallowness. A real man is one who discovers the secret of spirituality.

If in materialism there is pleasure of laughter, in spirituality there is greater and lasting pleasure. If materialism is to live a life of limitations, spirituality is to live in boundless freedom. ■